

Nixon and the End-the-War Vote

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 7—In the opinion of some Republican Senators, President Nixon contributed to his own defeat on the Vietnam issue in the Senate last week by presuming, in a letter, to lecture Congress on its responsibilities.

Senator Hugh Scott, the Senate Republican leader, found the President's letter so objectionable and insulting, according to Republican colleagues, that he sent it back to the White House as unacceptable. The letter, written on July 27 to the Congressional leaders of both parties, was similar to many that Mr. Nixon has sent to Congress in advance of a vote on the Vietnam issue, with the obvious aim of influencing the outcome. It recited all the reasons that Mr. Nixon found any end-the-war amendment by Congress to be intrusive on the powers of the Presidency and obstructive in the Paris peace negotiations.

But then, in the concluding paragraph, the President offered what was regarded by some Senators as a gratuitous insult. "If the Congress wants to undertake greater responsibilities in the field of foreign affairs," he suggested, "it should start by showing a sense of responsibility in fulfilling the important duties it now has."

Earlier in the letter, the President made what appeared to be an attempt to play upon pro-Israeli sentiments in Congress by suggesting that the amendments relating to Vietnam were jeopardizing aid to Israel. Contending that the end-the-war riders were threatening passage of foreign aid and military procurement bills, the President said: "Without these programs, our friends and our interests—in the Middle East, for example—are left high and dry."

The foreign aid authorization bill—which died in the Senate after a Vietnam troop-withdrawal amendment had been attached—provided some \$385-million in economic assistance

Letter That Stirred Ire in Congress Seen as Tactical Error

and military credits for Israel. At the suggestion of Senator Henry M. Jackson, the Senate, in the military procurement bill that was approved last week with a Vietnam amendment, authorized the President to sell Israel such arms as are deemed necessary to maintain a military balance in the Middle East.

To some Senators, including Mr. Scott, who discussed the matter with Republican colleagues, Mr. Nixon's letter, with its apparent presumption that the President could define Congressional responsibilities, was disrespectful of Congress as a coequal branch of the Government. This reaction, in turn, contributed to an attitude that, as a matter of principle and constitutional responsibility, the Senate had a right to lay down a legislative mandate for ending United States involvement in the war.

The Vietnam amendment, requiring the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Indochina in four months if American prisoners of war were released, was attached to the military procurement bill by a vote of 49 to 47 in the Senate. The Administration's defeat was attributed primarily to the White House's failure to switch a few crucial Republican votes. During the debate, Senator Scott made no mention of the Presidential letter and presented only a brief argument against the amendment.

Periodic Tensions

Mr. Nixon's letter and the Senate reaction were indicative of the periodic tensions of recent months between the White House and the Senate Republican leadership.

The White house, which has become increasingly annoyed at the independent stance of the Senate, tends to look upon Senator Scott as its agent for pushing Administration propos-

als through the Senate. But Senator Scott, who pointedly notes that his commission as minority leader derives from the Republicans in the Senate and not from the White House, sometimes feels that the White House is bullheaded and impervious to the mood of the Senate.

On the Vietnam issue, for example, Senator Scott vainly sought White House concurrence in a compromise amendment. The White House insisted, however, upon a clear-cut vote on the issue and lost.

The Vietnam issue is due for a crucial test in the House of Representatives this week with a vote, either Wednesday or Thursday, on an amendment that the once-hawkish House Foreign Affairs Committee has attached to a foreign aid authorization bill. The amendment would require the termination of all hostilities by Oct. 1, subject to release of prisoners of war and a limited cease-fire with North Vietnam to assure the safe withdrawal of American forces.

Close Vote Expected

The vote on the amendment is expected to be close, and the outcome may depend upon two Democratic leaders—Speaker Carl Albert and Representative Hale Boggs, the majority leader—upon whom the White House has been able to rely in the past to defend the President's position.

Mr. Albert and Mr. Boggs are uncommitted at this point, an indication that they may shift to support the amendment. If they do, they may be able to bring over enough middle-of-the-road and border-state Democrats to assure approval of the amendment.

The vote is also being watched by more liberal Democrats as a test of whether the two Democratic leaders are responsive to the will of the Democratic majority in the House and the Democratic caucus.